

Shortgrass herders no longer work enough unpapered aliens to make a mark on the government's apprehension report. Southern secretaries pass through, but their goal is the high pay in the cities.

Ranchers still feed the northbound traffic. In some instances, crews are preconditioned for two weeks to prepare them for work in the building trade or factories. However, once the stretch is taken out, they move on to the urban areas.

We no longer detain the travelers here at the ranch. I feed them one hot meal. Oldtimers that I know are given first aid for road blisters. Others are sent on their way. New day wet Mexicans have a continental personality. Broad travel in our country has educated them to zip codes and different time zones. Their knowledge of welfare laws is current; their tolerance of the postal service and bus routes is admirable.

I interview them when time permits. Without leaving the ranch, I can learn how much of the various interstate highways are completed, or how well the area codes are working in the Dallas-Fort Worth metropex.

I noticed one the other day on the highway who had a blue bag from Air France. Federal law forbids hauling illegal aliens. Air France, I'd heard, landed at Houston. I wanted to check with him on the coach rates to Miami, but was afraid a green-shirted Border Patrolman might misinterpret the deal as a job interview. Immigration officers are aware that ranchers are so short of help that they'd harness fire ants if they though they'd pull part of the lead. As much as I wanted the information, I knew that once a federal judge's gavel strikes the bench, all of Pattie Hearst's attorneys backed by a squadron of Coast Guard boats can't pull off a rescue.

High court ruling upheld California's law against employing illegal aliens. Texas legislators so far have been too busy to protect us from the practice. Last year at shearing, I considered asking to be held in the custody of the courts imported help on horseback after a couple of kids from the tropics of Mexico spooked a bunch of ewes and lambs so bad that the shearing crew stopped to watch the stampede. I'd have given \$16 for a hotwire to the Humane Society to call for a relief squad.

Ranchers drove a lot of the cowboys from Northern Mexico into other trades. Over near San Angelo a light sleeping graybeard that I knew worked a crew so many hours that one of them decided that the Sabbath in the United States must come on a Tuesday.

He was getting them up so long before daylight that he had to buy dark glasses to protect the pupils of their eyes. Other than the old pony that was kept up for a night horse, the rest of the remuda looked like they'd been officially declared dead from sleeping sickness.

I think the best ruling the courts could make would be to rule on our judgment. You know as well as I do that the biggest loophole in the income tax law is the amount of deductions that sheep and cow people receive from relying on their own judgment.

Horse sense, good common sense, is the most overrated virtue around. Bankers and ranchers in the drouth of the '50s and the market failure of the '70s used so much of those two items that it's going to take all of the '80s and '90s to amortize their decisions. I wish I'd stayed in school. Professors, everybody says, don't have any horse sense. Another thing that professors don't have are big notes down at the local jugs.

It doesn't matter whether the aliens come or go. A hundred years ago, two white settlers ranch the entire Shortgrass Country. The day may be coming when we'll move on north with the wets.